

## Children's Dental Health

DENTAL DISEASE IS the most common chronic illness affecting children. It is five times as common as asthma and seven times as common as hay fever. Dental disease is also one of the most preventable diseases affecting young people.

Dental disease can lead to chronic pain and infections, problems in speaking and learning, malnutrition and poor social relationships. No child can be truly healthy without good oral health. In other words, preventing dental disease is an important part of ensuring a child's overall well being. The following practices can help reduce dental disease in children.

### Early Care

Tooth decay in early childhood happens when liquids that contain sugar, including breast milk and formula, are left in a baby's mouth for a long time. To help prevent this, get in the habit of helping your baby fall asleep without a bottle. Hold your baby while feeding, then put your baby to bed without the bottle. If your baby must have a bottle to sleep, fill it with plain water. As soon as the first tooth appears, begin cleaning by wiping with a clean, damp washcloth or gauze square. When more teeth come in, switch to a small toothbrush with soft bristles and dampened only with water.

### First Dental Visit

The American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentists, the American Academy of Pediatrics and other dental and medical organizations recommend that children be seen for their first dental visit by their first birthday. Pediatric dentists and most general dentists see children for this first dental visit. This early visit allows the dentist to check the development of the child's teeth. It also provides an opportunity to educate parents about good dental care they should practice everyday at home.

### Brushing

Brushing teeth with fluoride toothpaste is a cornerstone of good oral health. Parents should brush the teeth of their children until age six or seven years of age and closely supervise the brushing until the child is at least eight or nine years of age. A child should use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and then spit out any excess toothpaste.

### Nutrition

Eating the right foods can also help protect your child's teeth from getting cavities. When your child wants to snack after school or before bedtime, choose foods without a lot of sugar. Good low-sugar snacks include fresh fruits and vegetables, unsweetened fruit juices, nuts, unsweetened cereals, popcorn, pretzels and cheese snacks.



### Fluoride

In addition to regular dental visits, daily brushing and flossing and eating the right foods, fluoride provides added protection against cavities. Water fluoridation is the adjustment of the natural fluoride in water to achieve an optimal level, which has been shown to significantly reduce cavities. Optimal levels are one part of fluoride to one million parts of water. Reliable scientific data have shown that fluoridation is a cost-effective, safe and practical way to reduce cavities. In areas where public water supplies have natural or adjusted fluoride at optimal levels, no additional fluoride supplements are necessary.

In the state of Utah, Davis and Salt Lake Counties now have fluoride in their public water at optimal levels so fluoride supplements are not needed for people living in those counties. Children living in areas without adequate levels of fluoride in the water should get fluoride supplements such as tablets, drops and fluoride mouth rinses to help prevent cavities. Your child's dentist or physician can prescribe the appropriate fluoride supplement.

To find out the fluoride level in your community, visit the Utah Oral Health Program or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web sites:

<http://health.utah.gov/oralhealth>

<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/MWF/Index.asp>

For more information contact the Utah Department of Health/ Oral Health Program at (801) 538-9177

### Children's Dental Health Facts

- More than 50 percent of children have dental decay in their primary teeth by six years of age.
- More than 80 percent of adolescents have dental decay by 17 years of age.
- It is estimated that 10 percent of all children under two years have dental disease.
- More than 500,000 school hours are missed every year in Utah due to dental related problems.